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Orange Balance: A Health and Wellness Website for Freshmen Women at Syracuse University

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Orange Balance: A Health and Wellness Website for Freshmen Women at
Syracuse University

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Sarah Santos

Candidate for Bachelor of Science
and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2016

Honors Capstone Project in Magazine Journalism

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
Melissa Chessher
Chair, Magazine Director,
Magazine, Newspaper &
Online Journalism

Capstone Project Reader: _____
Ann Hettinger
Adjunct Faculty, Magazine

Honors Director: _____
Stephen Kuusisto,
Director

ABSTRACT

Adjusting to a new lifestyle away from home can be a challenge, especially for students who are moving to college for their first year. Based on my own struggles with maintaining my health and finding my balance with food, fitness, and personal wellness, which I endured when first coming to Syracuse University in the fall of 2012, I have created a health and wellness website designed specifically for first year female students at Syracuse University. Using WordPress to build the online platform, and working with writers, photographers, and an illustrator, I have built a site that discusses topics such as food, fitness, life skills, and wellness. The goal of this website is to aid in making the shift of living away from home and adjusting to a college lifestyle a smooth and healthy transition.

The website can be viewed at: www.orangebalance.com.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of my Capstone is to create an online platform that makes it simple for first year female students at Syracuse University to become adjusted to the college lifestyle at SU. It is a website with content that discusses fitness, food, wellness, and life skills. It includes articles written by students, for students, and allows for freshmen to learn from upperclassmen that had once been in their shoes.

To begin the process, my advisor, Melissa Chessher, and I came up with the main verticals that I was going to include on the website. After brainstorming a few, we condensed the main ideas into four categories: food, fitness, wellness, and life skills. We then came up with a list of articles that would be included in the initial launch of the website. The food articles focused on the food that students could find in dining halls, around campus, as well as healthy eats that could be made in dorm rooms. The fitness articles revolved around workouts that could be done in one's bedroom, how to find a personal trainer on campus, how to remain active throughout the year, what the different gyms are on campus, their hours, as well as other activities to contribute to staying fit while in college. The wellness articles discussed mental health and articles relating to illnesses and hygiene. And the life skills articles discussed topics such as places to study on campus and how to adjust during one's first year away from home.

After coming up with the articles that the site was going to have, the next step was to come up with a team to help create the content. I reached out to different writers and assigned them different pieces, and while those were in the works, I worked with photographers to create stock photos and to shoot the images that I would include with articles on the website. The first photo shoot took place in late October to take advantage of the sun and the green grass that had not yet been covered by the Syracuse snow. I had six of my friends as my models and a photography student as my photographer, and we shot around 9 a.m. to get the most of the morning sun. We took photos of the models doing simple workout moves around campus and in front of the various buildings to truly capture the Syracuse scene. By the end of the photo shoot, we had around 800 raw photos to choose from.

I then had another photo shoot, this time indoors, to take more images of female students doing simple workout moves for more stock photos. During the third photo shoot, we took photos to turn into Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) images for one of the articles. The other photos that are currently included on the website are images that I took myself without a photographer, as well as drawings an illustration student drew for the site. The two photographers who took the photos for me also edited and finalized the photos, as well as created the GIFs.

While the creation of the articles and photos was underway, I began thinking about the creation of the website itself. One component that took awhile to come up with was the name of the website itself. Using GoDaddy.com, a website which sells domain names and web hosting applications, I searched for the availability of different domain names that I had brainstormed. Originally, I had wanted to use a domain name of “FreshFitCuse.com”, but after marinating on the name and discussing the option with Adam Peruta, my designing interactivity professor, we concluded that incorporating the trademark “Cuse” or any title related to Syracuse, including the acronym “SU”, may cause an issue due to copyright authority.

After exploring more options and thinking about what would best represent the content of the website and the type of message I wanted the site to represent, I eventually settled on the name, “Orange Balance”. I then purchased the domain name and with the help of Professor Peruta, installed the domain name into the WordPress account that I made for the site, and worked on building from there.

After the name was established, I worked with an illustration major who sent me four different options for logos to create the identity of the website. After looking at all of the options, I went with the mood titled, “energy,” and decided on the official logo as seen below:



Since I had learned basic HTML5 and CSS coding skills during my designing interactivity class I took in the fall, I had the original intention of creating a theme and layout for the website myself. I wanted to construct the style and design on my own and code everything as well, but after discussing the idea with Professor Peruta, came to the conclusion that creating my own theme and building it from scratch would require more knowledge than I had learned in class, and would not be possible to study in the little amount of time that I had left. With that in mind, I chose a predesigned theme made by a website theme designer, and learned to install it and build parts of the website on my own. I still had the ability to edit some CSS styles on my own, which was very helpful in making the website look the way that I wanted it to appear.

After the theme was installed, I began building the website on the backend of WordPress, and taught myself a few things using tutorials online. After a lot of trials and errors, temporary roadblocks, and unexpected challenges along the way, I was finally able to build the content into a theme that went well with the idea of the website.

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I would like to thank my project advisor, Melissa Chessher, for her guidance, encouragement, and for believing in me throughout the entire process of creating my Capstone. Without her support, I would not have thought that this was something that I could create. I would also like to thank my Capstone reader, Ann Hettinger, who generously took the time to make sure that I discussed everything thoroughly and with proper detail. I would like to thank Adam Peruta who guided me in setting up the website and for assisting me with technical issues that I encountered throughout the process. Thank you to the Renée Crown University Honors Program for giving me the opportunity to use everything that I have learned during my time here at Syracuse to create a lasting project that will remain one of the most challenging yet exciting achievements throughout my college career. A special thanks goes to everyone who has contributed to the creation of the content included in my Capstone, and for the friends who took the time to help me when new obstacles emerged. It was a pleasure getting to work with such talented people. I would also like to thank my friends that helped me laugh when I was stressed, and to my parents who have always believed in me and in everything that I do. The completion of this project would not have been possible without all of you.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

THE INFLUENCE

Not every great idea stems from an “aha moment,” a particular event, or by influence from just one specific person, idol, or previous creation. Rather, some ideas are born through collective instances, experiences, and trains of thought that when combined, leads to a bigger picture.

I've struggled with my weight my whole life. I've always been heavier than what was considered ideal for my height and age, but I've always been a very active individual. I played sports all throughout middle school and high school, was a two or three season athlete every school year, and could run and do more push ups than most of my friends. Regardless, I was never truly healthy. I was extremely active, but my eating habits and sleep pattern were never in check. I ate fast food often, was an extremely mindless snacker who usually reached for chips, cookies, and chocolate whenever they were readily available, and enjoyed processed foods more than anyone should. I never thought twice about going for another slice of pizza, and never really paid attention to anything that I was eating. I simply ate to enjoy. However, at five feet tall, my height and weight combined totaled an overweight body mass index. It was clear that a BMI like mine could eventually lead to health issues in the future, such as diabetes or high blood pressure that runs in my family. But it took me years to finally realize that what I was doing to my body was unhealthy.

It wasn't until the summer before my senior year of high school that I knew I needed to make a drastic change in my lifestyle. It hit me that I had let myself become overweight the day after the Fourth of July during the summer of 2011. I was with my friends and realized that I was the shortest, yet the largest out of all of them. I know that people should never compare themselves to anyone else because we are unique individuals with our own builds and backgrounds, but this was the first time that I really took a step back and took the time to think about myself and how I felt in my own body.

When the realization that change was necessary finally came across me, I knew that it was not going to happen on its own nor overnight. I thought about all of the things that the next year had in store, and thought about how much I wanted to be comfortable in my body because at the time, I was not. During this time in my life, my senior year of high school was approaching in just two short months, meaning it was my last chance to truly enjoy myself with my high school friends. My last homecoming was coming up in October, along with prom and graduation in June, and I wanted to be happy with the way that I looked and how I felt. I wanted to be proud of who I was, and I wanted to be the athlete that I knew I was capable of being.

The following day, I joined an all-girls gym and with the decision to get healthy, completely switched my eating habits. I burned hundreds of calories in the gym almost every day, built up my stamina by running three miles as part of every

workout, learned how to incorporate machine weights into my routine, and took whatever class the gym offered whenever I was there. It was a heart-pumping method of working out, because my workouts were never the same. Switching my heart rate up constantly was thrilling, and I automatically noticed the change in my mood and in the way that I felt.

Not only did I train my body to burn fat and become stronger through working out, but a very important factor in my lifestyle change was the switch of what I was eating. Willpower was something I was lucky to somehow develop overnight, just by deciding that I was going to become healthy. I got rid of processed, fried, and oily foods from my diet, strayed from eating out unless necessary or for a special occasion, and switched from being a mindless snacker to a mindful one. I became more aware of the food that I was putting into my body, and incorporated wholesome and nutritious meals into every day. Chips turned to carrots and rice meals turned to open face sandwiches made with whole wheat bread and accompanied by a side of fruits and vegetables. By the time school began again in September, I had shed about 25 to 30 pounds just by exercising more and adopting healthier eating habits. The best feeling was that I did it on my own, and in a healthy way. I didn't restrict myself, but my body just functioned better without the unhealthy foods I was once putting into it. By adopting this lifestyle, I no longer craved the pizza and oily snacks, but my body wanted yogurt, almond butter, fruit, and vegetables.

Throughout my senior year of high school, I was able to maintain the weight that I had worked so hard to achieve. I kept up with it because I continued to be a three-sport athlete, therefore fulfilling my daily workouts, but also because I no longer consumed unhealthy foods. I played volleyball in the fall, lacrosse in the spring, and was on the dance team during the winter and in the spring as well. By combining my active lifestyle with the upkeep of consuming nutritious foods, I stayed fit and happy. But when the summer before my first year of college came around, I began to worry about the lifestyle change that lay before me.

College always terrified me because I feared becoming distant from my friends and being away from what has always been familiar to me. But what also occupied the worries in my mind was how I was going to keep up with the active lifestyle that high school had allowed me to have. Prior to my first year at Syracuse, I had always feared the freshman 15. I worried that I'd become an example that the weight gain truly does exist because of how readily available unhealthy options are. I didn't know what type of food to expect from the dining halls, knew nothing about what types of snacks I could purchase on campus, or where any of the gyms were. I didn't know about any of the health services the university had to offer, and I had no one to contact who could give me advice on what to expect at Syracuse and what the transition is like. I was unfamiliar with what I was up against after move-in day, and had no one to ask who had first-hand experience.

When I was brainstorming ideas for my Capstone, the thought of creating a health and wellness resource for students immediately came to mind. As a magazine journalism major with a minor in nutrition, I knew that I wanted to create content that students could quickly access and learn from to make their transition to life at Syracuse a little easier. To make my project stand out and to make things more specific than just creating another health content resource on campus, Professor Chessher and I decided that the best way to go about this project was to pick a specific audience rather than just the general student body. Automatically, I knew that I wanted it to target women specifically because as a female student myself, I knew the types of questions I had prior to attending Syracuse. I could also ask my girl friends what they wish they had known, to get more insight as to what other female students, besides myself, were curious about as freshmen. As a website that is only starting, creating content for a very specific audience is much easier to brainstorm and cover than for an audience that is more broad.

After deciding to keep it specifically for women, we also thought that it would be best to make it a resource for first year students. The lifestyle of a freshman on campus is different from that of an upperclassman. Freshmen students oftentimes barely know anything about the campus, the food, and what to expect in the next four years. First year students also don't have access to a kitchen, therefore making it necessary to rely on options that are pre-made in the dining hall. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, already have an idea of where things

are on campus and what the university has to offer. Therefore, we decided to focus the content strictly to female first year students so the articles produced could be as specific and helpful as possible for the audience.

At first, I thought that the idea of creating a cellphone app would be the most helpful tool. I thought about the different health apps that I use, such as fitness tracking applications and food logs that are so readily available right on my mobile device. But after thinking more realistically about the process and how much I would have to learn about application development with the short amount of time that I had to create my finished project, I knew that an app like that would not be possible to make well with my short time frame. With that in mind, I decided that I wanted to create a website and that it would be my best option.

I became very interested in online and digital journalism the summer after my sophomore year at Syracuse. I interned for a print magazine, but worked mostly on the digital side of things. I wrote articles mostly relating to food and health which I helped build on WordPress, and quickly fell accustomed to the speed in which content goes up on the web, as well as the ability to share online posts with the click of a button. I am also a contributing writer for an online writing platform called Elite Daily, where I've written about friendship, love, and relationships. My contributions to Elite Daily, another platform developed through WordPress, gave me an even better understanding of how online journalism works. Publishing articles online also makes it easy to start a conversation, and I

liked seeing how well an article performed because I could then learn what works and what doesn't work.

Not only was I influenced by first-hand digital journalism experience, but I was also inspired by some of my favorite health and wellness websites. Some of my favorite magazines such as *Self* and *Health* always provide me with useful tips and information on how to improve my health and lifestyle. Websites like *Well + Good* also give me insight on new workouts to try, events going on in the New York City area where I am originally from, as well as healthy food options to incorporate into my next meal. With examples like these in mind, I wanted to create content that would make students excited to read and follow. I kept in mind the way that they formulate their heds, deks, and the types of images that they incorporate into their articles to inspire the type of content that I wanted to create on Orange Balance. My experiences as well as my admiration of other online health websites helped me solidify my idea to create a website as opposed to an application for mobile devices.

The summer after I confirmed the idea for my Capstone project, I had the opportunity to work on the digital team of another print publication, where I learned more about the type of content to post based on the audience I was aiming for, how to research new and recently published health studies, the type of photos that go well with online articles, as well as how to build articles using

more advanced web hosting applications and the importance of incorporating specific meta tags and keywords to optimize Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

When I returned to campus the fall semester of my senior year, I took a designing interactivity course offered in Newhouse to learn more about web design and development. By taking this course, I was able to learn basic HTML5 and CSS coding skills, as well as how to design layouts for desktop and mobile websites using Adobe Photoshop, and how to build a website using WordPress. After taking this course, I was more confident with building a website and had the basic skills necessary to make one of my own. With all of the knowledge that I gained from all of the classes I have taken during my four years at Syracuse including: multimedia storytelling, graphics, news writing, news reporting, magazine writing, magazine editing, designing interactivity, nutrition science, sports nutrition, and food as medicine, I went on to begin the actual process of creating a health and wellness website for freshmen women at Syracuse University.

THE ARTISTIC CHOICES

The artistic choices that I made were all inspired from different sources. For the theme of the website, although I did not code it on my own, I had a vision of the style that I wanted to have. I knew that I wanted an opening banner with a large

image right at the top of the page with a group of female students in front of Crouse, and luckily with the working theme that I was able to find, created that exact image. What's even better is that the banner had the ability to be a slideshow, so rather than just incorporating one homepage image, I could add multiple. I also made sure to make each vertical page a different layout, because I felt that keeping it the same throughout would make the website too uniform. I wanted diversity in the layouts, so I worked on WordPress to make each page different than the others. I also kept the background of the website a plain, white color because I wanted the website to pop with the images and the text without it being too overwhelming.

To make this possible, I asked the female students who modeled in my photo shoots to dress in bright colors and fun patterns. Luckily, the models owned vibrant color sneakers, bright tank tops, and types of clothing that varied from capri leggings, shorts, long sleeve shirts, and full length leggings. The colors that they wore really helped add unique and diverse color to the website without it being too overwhelming on the eyes.

When it comes to the poses that the models did for the photos, those were inspired by photos that I had found online through health and fitness Instagram accounts, as well as ideas that one of the photographers had helped me style. Although I ran into complications with the loss of the images from the initial photo shoot, I was very lucky to find them again right before the second photo shoot.

One of my favorite visual designs on the website is the incorporation of GIFs into one of the articles titled, "*How to Turn Your Dorm Into a Gym*," because to me, it truly creates a unique aspect of the website that shows that the website is real and something that really took a lot of time and effort to make. I'd love to create more in the future, because they're a great way for readers to follow step-by-step instructions for fitness and food recipes without having to watch whole videos.

WHAT I WOULD CHANGE

The process of creating a health and wellness website was a challenging yet enjoyable experience. If I could do it all over again, I would definitely change a few things because of some of the issues that I ran into along the way.

One of the first issues that occurred came about after the first photo shoot. Right before winter break, we had lost all of the outdoor photos that we took earlier in the semester. I panicked for a while and was not sure how I could possibly have another outdoor photo shoot with the snow, so I immediately scheduled another photo shoot for when we returned to school from winter break. I knew that we could not recreate the photos with the same scenery, but I was hopeful and knew that I needed to have more stock photos to make up for the photos that were lost. Luckily, right before the second photo shoot began when the photographer signed into her account on the school's computer in the photo studio, the folder

with the images we thought we lost were on her desktop. I got lucky during this instance, but after this happened, I learned that I needed to stay more on top of the progress that I was making, as well as the fact that it's much better to schedule things like photo shoots ahead of time. This allows for time to reshoot things in case issues like these occur.

Another issue that I ran into during the process of creating the website, was complications on the backend of WordPress. When I found the first theme that I wanted to use as the template for the site, I purchased it and tried to follow the installation video tutorial accordingly on my own. I followed the step-by-step instructions, but during the process, I somehow got locked out of the website. I could not get into the backend of the website because of an error with the code, and accessing it just as a user who typed in the domain name gave me the same error code as well. This was a challenge because I could not get to the page on the backend to edit the theme to remove the code that I had installed. With Professor Peruta's help, I learned how to uninstall WordPress with my domain name, giving me the ability to rebuild the website with a different theme. Luckily, I was able to find a new theme that was simple to install, but a little complicated to learn how to build with. However, I enjoyed the experience of learning how to build the website with the theme that I had chosen because it was like a puzzle that I had to figure out, and seeing things click and work properly is rewarding.

Lastly, one more thing that I would change is reaching out to people for help sooner. It was difficult for me to ask other students to help me with this project because of how shy I am. I worried that other students had too much on their plates to help, and I always felt a bit awkward about reaching out. Eventually, I knew that if I really wanted to make this possible, asking for help was necessary to have all of the content that the website called for. So one day, I decided that I just had to ask people and luckily, most of them said that they would love to help. Others had schedule and time conflicts due to class work. I learned that it is not so hard to reach out, and something that I should not fear in the future.

One of the most difficult parts about doing this Capstone was finding the motivation to really get started. This was the first time while at Syracuse that I have fully been in charge of a project with no one guiding me along a certain direction or telling me what I needed to get done. With that, I had to learn how to be my own boss and my own leader. If I were to start this process again, I would reach out to writers, photographers, models, and illustrators at an earlier time. Getting started earlier allows for overall better content in the end, and a stronger finished product. Believing in myself was something that was hard to do. If I could, I'd begin again and make better decisions when it comes to planning and progress.

OVERALL REFLECTION

The creation of this website has been a very challenging, yet eye-opening and rewarding experience. I have learned a lot about myself, about working with others, about the amount of time and effort it takes to create and build a website, and about the importance of staying committed to a project I begin in order to make it the best that it can be. I have also gained many skills that can be valuable in whatever field I may go into after college, as many of the skills used can be incorporated into countless jobs in the field of communication. This tested my leadership abilities, how to be my own boss, how to work with others, how to reach out for help in a timely manner, and how to set, follow, and assign deadlines. It also taught me valuable editing and writing skills and helped me practice creating heads and deks for articles. I also had the opportunity to brush-up on my Adobe Photoshop skills, as well as utilize the CSS coding knowledge that I had learned in class to change certain attributes on the backend of the website.

The best part about this project was not only the fact that I had the opportunity to learn but the fact that I had the chance to utilize all of the knowledge that I have gained since first coming to Syracuse four years ago, and that I had the opportunity to incorporate them all into one giant project. I have taken skills that I learned during my very first year at Syracuse in my multimedia storytelling class, combined them with all of the magazine editing and writing courses I have taken,

and also used the information that I had learned in my various nutrition classes to come up with content that would resonate best with freshmen students.

The process of creating this website also helped me realize how much I have grown during my time here at school, and how knowledgeable I am about the things that I often doubt that I know anything about. I have gone from being an intimidated freshman that feared taking on articles in campus publications because I worried that I wasn't good enough, to a senior who has accomplished more than I thought would be possible during my time here. I learned that I really can do anything that I put my mind to, and that I'm capable of creating my own website if I put in the necessary time and commitment into making it. Thinking back about this project truly excites me, and it's something that I want to continue to grow and build. I want to continue to work with digital journalism, because I've found that I enjoy content that can be edited and published at a faster pace.

Orange Balance is a website that I'd like to continue to keep around at SU. Although I won't be here next year to keep it alive or to watch it grow, I do want to pass it on to someone who is passionate about health, wellness, and helping others find their balance. I would also like to continue contributing to the site myself, and I am going to continue to work on the site this summer to improve the content and further develop Orange Balance. The current state of the website is still very new, and a lot of improvements can be made in the future. I would like to continue to add articles, photos, and GIFs, and to grow the website's archive,

as well as work on making the design cleaner, yet more intricate. It will take more learning and additional talent to help, but this is a project that I'd like to continue with and be a part of until it is ready to progress on its own. Hopefully come this August, this will be a more improved site that freshmen students will want to utilize.

I always say that to be both happy and healthy is the greatest challenge that I've ever taken on. With this project, I truly hope to make the transition for female first year students at Syracuse a smooth changeover from home to college. It's difficult having to move to a new place away from parents, close friends, and familiarity for the first time. There's a lot to learn and a lot to adjust to, and it can take a toll on one's mind and one's body. With a website like Orange Balance, I want students to feel a bit more comfortable with moving away to school for the first time. The content will be written by students and for students – mainly by upperclassmen who have been in the shoes of the freshmen who are reading the articles. I want the website to be a place where first year students can find information that will answer almost all of their questions relating to health and adjusting to the lifestyle at Syracuse. I want to give students a more personal and better understanding of what it's like to be a first year student on campus through both service articles and personal stories.

With Orange Balance, I hope that students find that a healthy lifestyle while away at college is possible. It may be terrifying at first, but the Syracuse campus is one

where a healthy lifestyle is possible to adopt. There are gyms by every dorm on campus, right by the dome, down on Marshall Street, as well as healthy options to choose from when dining, activities that are offered for stress relief and relaxation, as well as health services that provide more than just a checkup when students are sick.

I hope that in a few years, Orange Balance will be a widely known and commonly read website amongst freshmen students at Syracuse. I'm excited to see where this project can go and how it helps other students in their everyday lives. There are so many beneficial facilities to take advantage of while away at school, and I hope that with Orange Balance, first year female students at Syracuse will be able to utilize all this campus has to offer to live a happy, healthy, and balanced life.